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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2412
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2277
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2856
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EIND](#) [ECON](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: EXPERTS PREDICT CHAOS AROUND STATE
AGRICULTURE POLICY REFORM

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A meeting of the "Elders' Council," during which the President was supposed to approve a national program for state agriculture reform and which was initially scheduled for mid-December, has now been postponed until March. In making the postponement the President suggested that two months is too little time to complete the drafting of the national agriculture reform program. Local farmers worry that the late start of the reform in the middle of the agricultural season will cause chaos in the sector and have a negative impact on wheat and cotton harvests. In addition, discussion by the Elders' Council, which is little more than a rubber stamp, would most likely not have had any significant impact on the substance of the program. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Elders' Council is a quasi-governmental organization comprised of a government-selected membership. Late President Niyazov created this body in the early 1990's with the intention that it would serve as an advising body to the President. At the November 3 extended Cabinet meeting, President Berdimuhamedov clearly indicated that he would continue this practice of listening to advice from the Council.

¶3. (U) At the same extended Cabinet meeting, President Berdimuhamedov announced his intention to reform state agriculture in order to diversify agricultural production based on weather conditions, availability of irrigation water and labor resources. In particular, it would change Turkmenistan's current cotton growing practice from mandatory in all the five provinces to a more selective approach. Only those provinces which have appropriate weather conditions for cotton growing, sufficient irrigation water, and labor force will grow cotton. The President ordered Deputy Chairman for Agriculture and Water Management Myratgeldy Akmamedov to present a completed national agriculture reform program by mid-December, during the planned Elders' Council meeting. The President was also to have adopted the policy reform program at this meeting. In early December, President Berdimuhamedov -- having realized that the deadline for the presentation of the reform program was not realistic -- extended it until March.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: During Niyazov's presidency, the council operated as "democratic cover" for decisions made by the President. In reality, according to results from previous Elders' Council meetings, members of the Council are required to unanimously support

the President's decisions. Embassy contacts have reported that independent-minded members were asked to refrain from attending Council meetings. Furthermore, the new timing for the introduction of agricultural reform is not good. Local contacts point out that the agricultural season for wheat and cotton will be in full swing by the time the government adopts the reform program. Confusion stemming from operating under two policies, and anticipation of the reform, will disorient heads of state farms and cause chaos in the state agriculture sector. Local farmers suspect that the first year of the reform will be a failure -- primarily due to the late start of the program. END COMMENT.

MILES